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A plea for a measure of opacity: psychoanalysis in an age of transparency.

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‘Whatever can be catalogued is an occasion for despair’.

Gabriel Marcel (2002).

Introduction

It's December 1994, just before Christmas. Three friends and fellow explorers are visiting an area of the Ardeche in Southern France. They are on an expedition to search some of the caves for which the region is famous. Noticing a warm draught of air coming from a vent in the limestone cliff, they start to investigate, digging and tunnelling with their pickaxes until a narrow aperture opens up. Eventually, it is wide enough for them to squeeze through one by one until at last they reach a shaft that descends into a deep, black void. They pause here to prepare their equipment and unfold a ladder; and then they carefully climb thirty feet down the shaft until they reach the bottom of a vast, cold, damp grotto. They are greeted by profound darkness and utter silence. The air has a dank, moist, salty tang. As the beams cast by their headlamps flicker back and forth, the three friends can just make out a vast labyrinth of domed caves that extend off into the distance. The walls are covered with sparkling crystalline deposits; the rock floor is littered with stalactites that have crashed to the ground and dripping, waxy stalagmite columns stretch up towards a vaulted roof. As the explorers start to move deeper into the grotto, they realise to their amazement that the walls are covered with what appear to be prehistoric drawings and images. Painted directly onto the rock face are grazing reindeer, woolly mammoths, a pack of hunting lions, a crouching cave-bear, four wild horses in profile, fighting rhinoceroses, an ibex, an owl... There is even what appears to be an erupting volcano alongside a series of red, stencilled human handprints. There are hundreds of extraordinary images. The explorers are subsequently to learn that this ancient art gallery has lain peacefully in the dark, undisturbed, unseen for over 36,000 years. This is the Chauvet cave.

As soon as they heard the news, the authorities acted fast. Anxious to preserve such a precious cultural asset, the Ministry of Culture immediately sealed off the site, allowing only a handful of scientists and researchers to visit under highly stringent conditions. They had learned a bitter lesson from their catastrophic experience of the Lescaux caves some decades previously. Then, in 1948,

the public came in their thousands to view prehistoric cave art that was over 17,000 years old. But opening the caves up to air and light destroyed their fragile atmospheric balance. Over the next ten years, the walls of the Lescaux caves became covered in a green slime made up of rapidly-growing fungi and bacteria, probably due to contamination from visitors and the use of high-powered spotlights. The artwork became obscured by white crystal deposits and the moisture in the air produced by a new air-conditioning system washed away the pigments in many of the frescoes. Finally, an infestation of ugly black mould confirmed a process of irreversible deterioration. The caves were finally closed in 1963.

After that, it's hardly surprising that the Chauvet cave was never opened to the public at all. Instead, the French government spent millions on an elaborate replica, using advanced, high-fidelity digital technology to model the extraordinary prehistoric artwork. The real cave was sealed up and left intact. All we can do now is to ponder the mystery of its presence. What was the purpose of this hidden art gallery? We know that people of the time did not live in the cave, so for what reason did these ice-age artists make their way into its depths? If these images were to be so carefully concealed, why were they created at all? John Berger, the art critic and writer, was one of the few privileged people to visit Chauvet before its entrance was shut. He suggests that for the hunter gatherers of the time, hiding was a matter of life and death. Survival in those days crucially depended upon finding cover. Perhaps then, we might imagine that the Chauvet artists drew in secret in order to preserve something precious, something that could survive only under cover of darkness, not in the glare of the light. Of course, we have to accept that we may never know what this magnificent underground cathedral was used for; nor why the ice-age artists chose to decorate its innermost walls with their vivid, delicate, astonishingly accomplished and sophisticated drawings. But it seems likely that the cave was a spiritual place, and that the pictures refer to ancient magical or shamanistic rituals whose meaning remains unknown and indeed profoundly unknowable to us. They are testament perhaps to the idea that there are things in the world that need to remain underground; that must stay secret, undisclosed and unknown.

Transparency

I wonder if the hiddenness of the Chauvet cave can tell us anything about our very contemporary preoccupation with visibility and transparency? Ever since the Enlightenment, knowledge has been profoundly linked to the metaphor of light. The idea that *'to see is to know'* so firmly grounds our current way of being in and understanding the world it is hard to imagine otherwise. Transparency is truly a cornerstone of modernity. Foucault (1980) speaks of how *'A fear haunted the latter half of the eighteenth century; the fear of darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full*

visibility of things, men and truths. It sought to break up the patches of darkness that blocked the light, eliminate the shadowy areas of society, demolish the unlit chambers where arbitrary political acts, monarchical caprice, religious superstitions, tyrannical and priestly plots, epidemics and the illusions of ignorance were fomented (p. 153).

Transparency nowadays carries connotations of openness, democracy, accessibility and truth. Contemporary democratic systems must vigorously demonstrate transparency in order to be seen as reliable, dependable and free from corruption. Accordingly, information is now made available on a grand scale: we are all only a mouse-click away from facts, figures, data, statistics, annual reports, policies, research records, pay-scales, meeting agendas and minutes of public bodies, institutions, charities and government offices. Our determination to disinfect the cobwebby corners of public life – our insistence on open government, freedom of information, informed consent and the public's right to know - has resulted in a culture privileging not only the visibility of information, but also the visibility of the self. Very few of us are able completely to escape the chattering spotlight of transparency, whether it comes from our use of the internet, mobile phone apps or social media sites.

Despite its progressive and emancipatory promises, transparency all too often results in unintended consequences. Tsoukas (1997) comments how the mass of information thrown up by the transparency agenda not only produces swathes of data incomprehensible to the lay person, but also leads to a range of conflicting opinions and interpretations. This undermines trust in professionals like doctors, lawyers, teachers and psychotherapists whose 'expert systems' cannot be rendered completely transparent. Strathern (2000) similarly points out how the rhetoric of transparency often leads to growing uncertainty within an organisation where '*the language of accountability takes over the language of trust*' (p. 314). We are all familiar with the vicious institutional cycle of ever-increasing demands to record and report that sponsors a culture of mistrust, suspicion and apathy. A lack of trust between institution and clinician of course results in yet more insistent demands for quality control and quality assurance. Michael Power (1999) too comments on the practices of transparency whose ideals may deter rather than encourage critical inquiry; and how comforting organisational illusions about the existence of 'accountable' processes frequently preclude rather than facilitate meaningful change. Most recently, it is clear that many methods of inspection and evaluation legitimised by the transparency agenda are selected for their compatibility with agendas privileging hidden political vested interests. Paradoxically these days, it is the *invisible*, not the transparent hand of the marketplace that dominates and determines the field.

But these intrusive systems of governance are now part and parcel of the way all public services have been taken over by neoliberal ideologies. State funding is only allocated to services that perform according to an assortment of targets and indicators, and in the NHS, a 'market for care' (Hoggett, 2006) overwhelmingly privileges accountability, neo-bureaucracy and economic rationalism. New Public Management strategies of competition, incentivisation and choice are deployed in the interests of making services more efficient and responsive to 'customer' need. These forms of governmentality not only shape our services, they shape the way we think and feel about ourselves. As Foucault predicted, our subjectivities are becoming ever more moulded, circumscribed and limited not only by the relentless superintending of our work by service managers, commissioners and government departments, but also by the way in which we watch and evaluate ourselves. We have set up a culture of surveillance within, becoming complicit with regulatory strategies that aim to control, manage and evaluate our behaviour in ways that conform to current political and neoliberal priorities.

For some time now I've been very interested in the unconscious dynamics of organisations subject to the demands of transparency and governmentality. I've also been interested in how the highly bureaucratised systems within the NHS bear a remarkable resemblance to the defensive systems outlined by Isabel Menzies-Lyth in 1959 in her study of why nurses were leaving one particular hospital. She found that nurses were experiencing enormous emotional difficulties working with sick, injured and dying patients. She suggested that a number of working practices in the hospital – the idealisation of the professional, detached nurse, the identification of patients by number rather than by name, the avoidance of any changes to routine, and the reduction of responsibility by deferring to superiors - all served as institutionally-embedded defences against anxiety. At the same time, they reduced nurses' emotional investment in relationships with their patients, the very thing that had brought them into nursing in the first place.

We're all familiar with contemporary examples of such defensive practices in today's mental health services. They include the manualisation of treatment protocols; stringent, box-ticking assessment procedures; an emphasis on session by session clinical outcome measures; and, in some services, telephone contact instead of face-to-face work. I've thought about how these organisational aspects of mental health services can function as a defence against the unconscious anxieties aroused by contact with psychological vulnerability; and how such bureaucracy results in a perverse relationship to emotional reality where the second order representation of results becomes more important than the feelings these proxy measures signify.

Secrecy

But in a society so in thrall to visibility and exposure, I wonder whether there is something more to be understood about the transparency agenda, about its significance and pre-eminent status in today's world. For there appears to be nothing that cannot be seen under transparency's pitiless glare; nothing that cannot be captured under its ever-expanding net of numbers, categories and classifications. Nothing can be concealed. If *to see is to know*, then not being able to see and grasp *everything* seems to evoke an anxiety that we know *nothing*; and the anxiety aroused by the idea of *knowing nothing* provokes a further insistence on total visibility. So at the very least we might think of the transparency agenda as an unconscious defence against the troubling notion of invisibility or secrecy. Secrecy here becomes transparency's antonym, standing for all that is unacceptable, undesirable and antidemocratic within society.

Indeed, one of the more interesting features of the transparency agenda is the assumed presence of a concealed secret that could, in principle, be brought to light. If only we dig deep enough, if only our measuring instruments are refined enough, if only our grasp is tight enough, then surely we can root it out. But if we examine the origin of the word secret, we learn that it comes from the Latin *secernere*, meaning to set apart or divide; to withdraw, exclude or separate off. So we could say the secret is something that is separated off from that which *can* be known. Perhaps this is why Derrida (2001) tells us that in transparency, *'the secret is never broached/breached. If I am to share something, to communicate, objectify, thematise, the condition is that there be something non-thematizable, non-objectifiable, non-shareable. And this 'something' is an absolute secret'* (p. 57). The absolute secret, then, doesn't yield to excavation, to transparency. Secrecy, as Derrida goes on to say *'does not consist in hiding something, in not revealing the truth, but rather in respecting the absolute singularity, the infinite separation of what binds me or exposes me to the unique..'* (2001, p. 123). Derrida seems to be pointing towards secrecy as an inherent quality of otherness, an irreplaceable uniqueness that cannot be shared, must not be shared, never could be shared. Perhaps like Winnicott's (1963) incommunicable core, we could say of the secret that *'it is a joy to be hidden but a disaster to be found'* (p.186).

Derrida (1992b) goes on to highlight something even more significant about the nature of the 'absolute secret': its meaning is not *'available to information'*. Secrecy, he says, *'is not a thing, some information I am hiding or that one has to hide or dissimulate; it is rather an experience that does not make itself available to information, that resists information and knowledge, and that immediately encrypts itself'* (p. 201). So whilst there are things that *can* be known, there is a quality of *'unknownness'* that is not amenable to the transparent registers of knowledge and information. The

absolute secret is not something that we can easily see, grasp or comprehend; it is rather an *experience* which we can only with difficulty sense or apprehend. Perhaps this is a clue to one of the hidden problems of transparency practices that rely on the presumption that everything be visible, shareable and inspectable: that it *be at our disposal*. The '*parade in the public square*', as Derrida calls it, ensures not only that everything must be seen, lucid and clear; but also that it must be converted into information. Everything must be reduced to abstract, codified fragments of information that in today's digitized world can be saved, stored, cut, pasted, collated, manipulated, reported, sent, bought and sold. These decontextualized pieces of information are then presumed to index or symbolise something of interest – depression, for example, or anxiety - in a way that is deemed to be scientific, neutral and apolitical. Yet all this information can mean our understanding and concern for those who are depressed and anxious too readily collapses into a concern for statistics, waiting lists, outcome measures and readmission rates: data that is manifestly neither neutral nor context-free. It certainly does not speak for itself; it requires a human perspective from which to infer and think about its meaning. Without such a perspective, the more information we are asked to provide, the easier it is to slide away from the very phenomena we are trying to understand - and the less we are able to appreciate its complexity, depth and meaning. The greater the visibility, the greater the shadow cast by that which is invisible, by that which is not reducible to information.

Take words for example. Rawlins (2009) insists that public sector organisations and services should provide information that is, and I quote: '*inclusive, auditable, complete, relevant, accurate, neutral, comparable, clear, timely, accessible, reliable, honest and holds the organisation accountable*' (p. 79). This kind of discourse is pre-eminently the discourse of the protocol, the policy and the procedure, where words are pinned down to as precise and unambiguous a meaning as possible. At stake is accountability: are you providing what you say you are providing? Can you show that you are offering the service that you say you are offering? There is an anxiety here which in the psychotherapeutic field has resulted in an insistence on manualisation, where *what* we do as clinicians and *how* we do it is to be specified as tightly as possible. Manualisation implicitly relies on a model of clinical work that treats words as information and therapy as some kind of exchange of information between therapist and patient. It presupposes a linear relationship between what the therapist says and what the patient hears. In other words, there is an assumption that everybody says what they mean, that others have access to that same meaning in an unproblematic way, and that there is a predictable relationship between the information imparted and any clinical change that ensues. In a business ontology, of course, this may well be so. But in the quite different ontology of a psychoanalytic session, I think we are very far from knowing what we or our patients

mean, never mind how they hear what we say. Our language speaks us, as Lacan knew, revealing more unconscious divisions and ambiguities than are dreamed of in the philosophy of neoliberal rationality.

More importantly, as Virginia Woolf knew, words don't like being lifted out on the point of a pen and examined separately. We can't determine the meaning of words by treating them as so many individual fragments of information. Neither transcripts of every therapy session, nor CCTV cameras in every consulting room would be able to convey the personal or intimate meaning of what occurs in a psychotherapy session. Nor could they predict what outcomes might result. Cameras and transcripts can only provide evidence of *what is seen and heard*, not of what is unseen and inaudible. The subtlest of microphones will fail to detect beneath the exchange of words that dense and invisible unconscious communicative traffic flowing between therapist and patient. When Bion (1970) discusses the difficulties of conveying what goes on in an analytic session, he says: *'the belief that an event belongs to a category of 'events in external reality' leads to confusion and contradiction'* (p. 50). When we strip words of their associations, their unconscious meaning and significance, I think we are in danger of constituting the individual not as someone with a radical singularity, a unique, excessive subjectivity to be noticed, developed and celebrated. Rather, the individual becomes the desubjectified, docile bearer of pieces of information, now deemed a public asset to be traded along with other commodities. In such an individual, there is little space left for secrecy. And *'if the right to the secret is not maintained'*, says Derrida (1992b, p. 201), *'we are in a totalitarian space'*.

Secrecy and totalitarianism.

What does Derrida mean by this? Well, one of the problems with the transparency agenda is the impossibility of exempting ourselves from its discursive and moral claims to legitimacy. A society that is committed to the ideals of transparency has no place for those who wish to exclude themselves from its project. Even the wish to hide assumes guilt. If you are innocent, why would you not wish to share? If what you are doing in the consulting room is 'good practice', why would you not want it looked at? Any democratic regime that seeks legitimation and accountability via transparency all too easily slides into totalitarianism when it becomes complicit with strategies of public surveillance in which no private forum is permitted. Indeed, these days we are ourselves complicit with surveillance methods that we willingly incorporate into our daily lives: every time we share, retweet, like, friend or post; when we use our mobile phones, our apps, our fitbits, our smart technology. We know from George Orwell that totalitarianism operates best when the individual's internal world is open, exposed and available to inspection; where surveillance of the soul is total. In

today's world, we collude with Big Brother in ways that Orwell couldn't have possibly imagined. We even pay for the privilege. But if *to see is to know*, then totalitarianism in all its forms assumes that human beings *can* be seen in their totality and *can* therefore in principle *be known*; that we *can* and do have access to ourselves, and we *can* therefore account for our beliefs, our desires, our motivations.

But this is where we might want to pause. As psychoanalytic practitioners, we might be reluctant to assume any such accountability, despite practising within a culture that endorses, if not mandates, public confession as a means of personal healing and reparation. Although psychoanalysis is in the service of greater self-awareness and understanding, as clinicians we know this aim cannot be secured by the popular rush to transparency. Quite the reverse. Despite recent therapeutic models proposing a level of confidence-sharing and self-disclosure by therapists, psychoanalysis remains predicated on a degree of anonymity, confidentiality and abstinence. It is these unfashionable qualities that provoke the transference and allow the patient to project on to the therapist feelings and fantasies deriving from his or her early relationships. '*The physician*', says Freud (1912), '*should be opaque to the patients*' (p. 118). It is this opacity, this hidden or enigmatic quality in the therapist that permits unconscious material to emerge and become available for interpretation. Nor, despite the invitation to free association, should we assume that transparency on the part of the patient is really possible. However eager patients may be to reveal themselves, however willing to tell us their stories, the emergence of resistance indexes a process of unconscious camouflage that inaugurates the need for psychoanalytic work in the first place.

So perhaps we need to remember that any reference to the unconscious forces us to acknowledge the limits of what is possible to have access to within ourselves. Jean Laplanche's reworking of Freud's metapsychology argues that our subjectivity is given over from the start to the other as a condition of our primary relationality. From infancy, we are subject to our caregivers' enigmatic, unconscious messages whose repressed, untranslatable excess installs itself within us as the basis of our own unconscious drives. The residue of the other within leaves us forever foreign to ourselves, formed in ways that we can never fully know or grasp. Acted upon by the desire of the other in ways that we could never make sense of, ways that we continue to struggle with throughout life, we are left with an opacity at the heart of the self that cannot, as Judith Butler (2005) says, '*be tied to the conceit of a self fully transparent to itself*' (p. 83). Like Derrida's '*absolute secret*', the opacity is the vital sign of otherness at the heart of the self; a sign that paradoxically separates off our private subjectivity from the collective forum.

Edouard Glissant: the 'right to opacity'.

Instead of drawing further on psychoanalytic theory, I want to develop my thinking by drawing on the work of the late Martiniquan poet and philosopher Edouard Glissant, who died in 2011. Glissant, a contemporary of Franz Fanon's, was a post-colonial writer who engaged deeply with issues relating to French-Caribbean language, identity and history. More broadly, he is critical of the Western genealogy and tradition of binary opposites and contradictions, dominant norms, closed identities and uniform rules. Taking issue with what he calls the ideal of a '*transparent universality*' imposed by Western perspectives, Glissant (1997) critiques the colonial tendency to reduce and diminish otherness in the direction of familiar models and categories that offer a false sense of understanding. '*If we examine the process of 'understanding' people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought*' he suggests, '*we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps judgements. I have to reduce*' (pp.189-90).

I am not able, nor am I qualified, to do justice to Glissant's complex body of writing and thinking. But I want to pick out, for the purposes of this paper, his particular interest in *opacity or unknowability*. Whilst psychoanalysts are interested in personal or psychological opacity, Glissant is interested in *cultural opacity*. The other's cultural identity, he suggests, is something that we cannot ever fully know or share; it is constituted by an irreducible singularity, a stubborn germ of otherness or difference that is only ever partially penetrable or knowable. Like the enigmatic contents of the unconscious that we only glimpse through dreams, jokes and slips of the tongue, like the poem whose meaning is fundamentally impenetrable, opacity cannot be captured by the philosophy of the visible, for we exceed the grasp of universal categories, scales, measures and algorithms; we elude the spotlight of exposure and revelation. Glissant calls into question the way modernity has naturalised and legitimised transparency and accountability practices. He frames them not simply as a limited attempt to measure, weigh and count but rather as a colonial project to control, regulate and subdue. His work allows us to examine the authority of transparency's claim to be the principal technical solution to social, political and environmental issues - and to problematize this as a strategy deployed in accordance with powerful political vested interests.

In Glissant's thinking, opacity seems to be what remains stubbornly resistant to reductive economic or evaluative frameworks. In language, it is constituted by that which cannot be read easily. This is why Glissant speaks about opacity as a *poetics of relation*, an ethical position that aligns with poetry as an aesthetic practice gesturing towards the incalculable. Like the best of poetry, Glissant's

language is dense, radiant, and resistant to understanding; it doesn't '*wear its meaning on its sleeve*' (Prinz and Mandelbaum, 2014, p. 56). To pursue its meaning, we are put to work; will have to make an effort; but no formula, algorithm, or metric will help us here. For Glissant, it is the poem's very opacity that engages us; it invites, it sponsors, it begs interpretation. Like Laplanche's enigmatic signifier, it is a force field confronting us with '*an insistent presence*', as Glissant (1997) says, '*that we are incapable of not experiencing*' (p. 11). Like Derrida's absolute secret too, a poem is not reducible to information. It not only faces us with a call to appreciate its persistent and enigmatic density, but it also confronts us with a demand to resist closure via standardised, uniform or instrumental responses. A *poetics of relation* is thus constituted by what Glissant (1997) calls a '*double thrust, being a theory that tries to conclude, a presence that concludes (presumes) nothing. Never one without the other.... Every poetics is a palliative for eternity*' (p. 183).

But one of the hidden aims of contemporary transparency practices, as Simek (2015) points out, is precisely to insist on a mode of disclosure that *does* conclude; that does indeed '*wear its meaning on its sleeve*'; a meaning whose honesty and integrity is so self-evident that it appears to require no interpretation at all. So when Glissant makes a trenchant claim for what he calls '*the right to opacity*', I think he is claiming the right to oppose these reductive, homogenizing discourses of transparency by insisting on slow, critical and imaginative readings that respect, sustain and foster the fundamental unknowability of the self and others: '*I thus am able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me*' says Glissant (1997) '*without reproach for my opacity for him*' (p. 193). Mutual respect for opacity here becomes the basis of our ethical relation to one another; transparency being appropriation, domination, annexation. Of course, the right not to be reduced by the colonizer to universal terms that construct the other as an object of knowledge doesn't just have significant clinical implications; it has political ones too. Framing opacity as a 'right' has the potential to destabilize, unsettle and interrupt the state's practices of surveillance that privilege and prioritise transparency. It takes ethical issue with forms of knowledge and understanding that too readily seek to reduce and resolve ambiguity, strangeness and difference; which too quickly seek to comprehend that which is beyond the reach of information; whose significance we may only later, partially, and with some difficulty come to apprehend.

Opacity and psychoanalysis

What might this all mean for us as psychoanalytic practitioners? What might it mean to claim a '*right to opacity*' into today's world, in today's public sector services that are obsessed with evidence-based practice, outcome measures, evaluations, audits and the like? How might we resist the infatuation with information technology that stalks us via mental health apps, digitized

appointments and computerized psychological therapy? How can we contest what Zuboff (2014) calls the '*weapons of mass detection*' deployed by regulatory processes in the consulting room? And how might we best characterise the collateral damage done to the field of psychotherapy in the name of unbounded surveillance? For there is certainly a tyranny in transparency, as Strathern (2000) points out; there is violence in the imposition of a business ontology that forces us to act as auditors, inspectors and customers rather than as therapists, patients and citizens; and in the way our therapeutic spaces have been colonized by government programmes such as IAPT or PREVENT that are predicated on transparency; that even demand we report our patients for suspicious words, thoughts and feelings. These and other encroachments of the state into the consulting room I think require us to develop much more thoughtful, critical and resistant ways of working. To adopt a *poetics of relation* perhaps, in which we resist imposing any fixed or exclusionary understandings, interpretations or categories on our patients. In which we remain latent, open, subjunctive in mood. Or, as Glissant (1997) says, '*multilingual in intention*', '*forever conjectural*' (p. 32).

One of the difficulties I think we face as psychoanalytic practitioners is that we ourselves identify with opacity. We work in the shadows; we hide in the recesses of our consulting rooms. All too often, we prefer to withdraw from the rough and tumble of public debate, dispute and dissent. Yet we exist in a field, a discipline, a democracy. And insofar as democracy is synonymous with transparency, the subject of democracy, today more than ever, is obliged to demonstrate his or her transparent credentials; to 'perform' transparency in ways that conform to the demands and norms of an information-driven society. Indeed, the requirement to be *literally* visible at all times is increasingly deemed fundamental to our right to be included as legal citizens at all. We might want to think here about the government's use of identification and tracking techniques such as biometric passports, DNA testing, facial recognition, and retinal or fingerprint scanning. We might also want to remember the anxieties evoked in this country by the wearing of the Muslim headscarf or veil. And yet, as Derrida, Glissant and Laplanche show, we are constituted by and through an irreducible opacity that always already precludes us from fully surrendering to the state's requirement for visibility. By maintaining, as we must, our partial transparency then, we inevitably risk the very social bonds that guarantee our recognition as unique individuals and which authorize and legitimate our place within the biopolitical order.

This uncomfortable dilemma is, I think, constitutive of the critical stance. '*My position as a political subject*', says Bacevic (2018), following Butler (2002), '*is predicated on the practice of critique, which entails reflecting on the conditions that make my life difficult (or unbearable). Yet those conditions are in part what constitute my capacity to engage in critique in the first place*'. If the assumptions and norms of today's practices of transparency threaten to make our psychotherapeutic work

untenable, we are at the same time dependent on those very same practices to recognise us as subjects within the psychotherapeutic community. To critique those practices as a therapist then is to articulate a position for ourselves outside and beyond the epistemological and ontological jurisdiction of the transparency agenda. This carries a certain risk. For if I am partially formed by the very practices that I am here attempting to critique, then I risk *de-forming* myself, according to Butler (2002) when I claim my '*right to opacity*'; when I adopt its interrogatory relation to the field of transparency; when I dispute transparency's epistemological limits and conditions; and when I am sceptical of the legitimacy, neutrality and morality of its demands.

Yet this kind of critique does not call for an end to transparency and I think in any case that would be to perpetuate a binary that I want to avoid. There are clearly contexts and situations, particularly the workings of government, where there is a legitimate call for transparency - even though, as I have indicated, this inevitably entails a level of inconsistency and contradiction. But I want to suggest our psychoanalytic training not only prepares us, it *authorises* us to take up a critical stance towards transparency. Our interest in the unconscious ensures we are well-placed to scrutinise the transparency agenda's omnipotent claims as well as to comment on its limits and constraints: on the ethics of what it does and who it's for; how it's practiced; and the extent to which - and by whom - it is held to account. But for me, the main reason we might want to adopt a critical rather than a compliant attitude is because transparency forecloses any critical relation *to itself*; its qualifications are deemed to be self-evident; its credentials pre-empt and preclude the need for any further inquiry or other possible modes of disclosure. So it is perhaps inevitable that our insistence on a '*right to opacity*' will not simply result in accusations of naïveté and ignorance; it will also incur ridicule, if not outright contempt. This is not just because our claim interrogates the moral, epistemological and economic imperialism of transparency; but because it opposes a regime of truth that defines, delimits and diminishes *what* and *who* will 'count' in the world. If, as Foucault (1997) argues, critique is '*the art of not being governed quite so much*', then I think we might also claim the right, along with opacity '*not to be governed like that*' as he says '[not] *by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them*' (p. 44).

Conclusion.

How might it be possible to articulate and defend a position that disputes the idea that '*to see is to know*'? How can we go beyond frames of reference delimited by those practices of transparency whose good is held to be self-evident? How might we imagine otherwise those modes of disclosure

that trap us under the accreditation of certainty, the precision of facts, the violence of universal laws?

In creating something that was destined to remain in the shadows, maybe the artists of the Chauvet cave have something to tell us about the value of what we can't see; the value of what we can't know. These artists can never have intended their paintings to be examined by scientists, dissected by researchers, discussed by art critics and interpreted by psychoanalysts. The meaning of their artwork surely lies far beyond the reach of scientific analysis, radiocarbon dating, and debates about the history of art. Rather, its hiddenness gestures towards the importance of an experience of some kind, perhaps a sacred experience; something that needed to be remembered, and so redeemed from oblivion even whilst its testimony was destined to remain in the dark. It is precisely this kind of numinous, opaque experience that I think is so deeply resistant to our limited ways of understanding and knowing. I can't help but feel there is a value to what remains exiled within the silence of that sealed cave, even though it may not yet be available to us in words. It *is* available to us as an ethics perhaps, a hidden tribute to the value of opacity; of things that can only be felt, apprehended, sensed and experienced rather than known, grasped, controlled and possessed.

It remains a rare zone of darkness in a world that loves the light.

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